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Kenneth Anger Rising

IS THE GOSSIPY OCCULTIST WHO WROTE *HOLLYWOOD BABYLON* REALLY AN AGENT OF LUCIFER? OR IS HE JUST A DEVILED HAM?

Article by John Calendo

I've always wanted to interview Kenneth Anger, but he seems to shun the press even more than Garbo; certainly he has been as much a cult figure as Garbo. Though primarily an underground film maker, Anger is notorious for his book *Hollywood Babylon*, a scandal bible jam-packed with filthy, filthy dish. (Tyrone Power, Anger explains, was a "shit fancier" . . . James Dean liked "sex spiced with knowing cigarette burns" . . . Humphrey Bogart had "the biggest jing-jang in showbiz"—and these are just the asides!) First published in Paris in 1959, the French edition of *Hollywood Babylon* became, in the words of

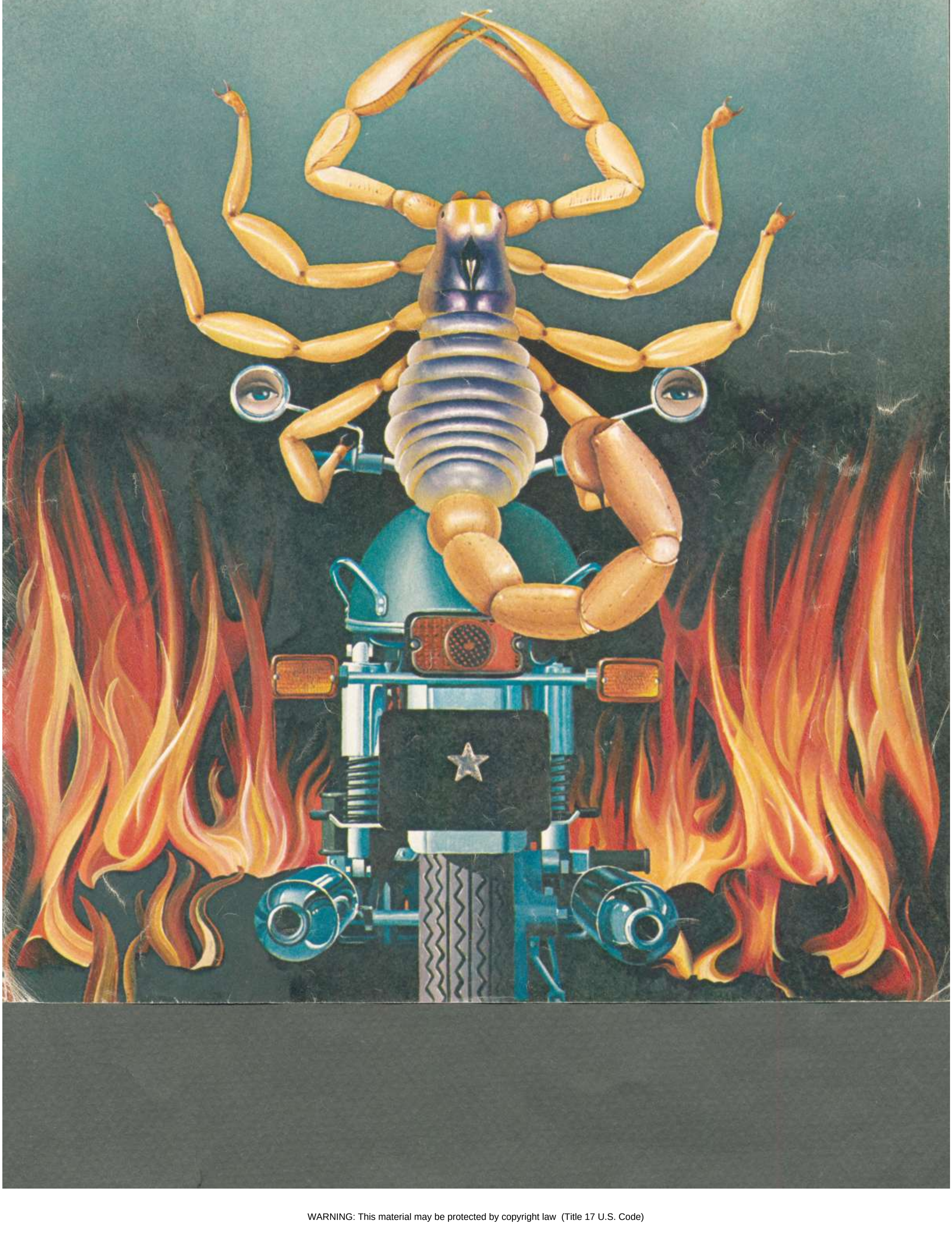

Illustration by Heather Cooper

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KENNETH ANGER RISING *"Scorpio Rising" has something for every-weird-body: leather boys in jockstraps; an S/M-er mooning over death-fetish photos of James Dean; and bikers polishing their hogs.*

critic Susan Sontag, "a book as legendary as its subject," numbering among its fans not only Sontag herself—the headmistress of camp—but also such headmasters as Jean Cocteau, Andy Warhol and Ken Russell. The text, in fact, provided the cornerstone for what has been called the Kenneth Anger School of Cinema, best represented by such iconoclasts as Fred Halsted, of the gay fist-fucker flicks, and John Waters, of the Divinely shit-eating *Pink Flamingos*.

Yea, Anger is the culture hero's culture hero. For sheer exotica, he has gained points by belonging to a mystical sect that literally worships The Beast and The Whore—the twin horrors of Saint John's *Apocalypse*. Anger is absolutely serious about these beliefs: *Hollywood Babylon* is dedicated "To the Scarlet Woman" (aka the Whore of Babylon).

A disciple of the satanist Aleister Crowley, Anger owns the third-largest collection of Crowley's books and uses them, he claims, to conjure up demons and also to cast spells—via his movies. With this chic whiff of brimstone to recommend him, Anger found himself befriended by Mick Jagger, who based *Sympathy for the Devil* on Anger's demonic theories; Jimmy Page, of Led Zeppelin, who recently bought Crowley's Scottish manse so that Anger might someday be buried under it; and Bobby Beausoleil, who was Anger's lover before, at Charles Manson's behest, he murdered Gary Hinman.

Yet Anger is best-known not for his devil worship or even for *Hollywood Babylon*, but for a 31-minute movie, *Scorpio Rising*, a homoerotic riff on leather boys that was shot in 1962 and is still used in college pop-culture courses. The film has been both damned and praised. To the police—as well as to many anxious undergrounders—the homage to motorcycle death-lust was immoral, lewd and perverse. But to the arty crowd that journeys to basement theaters to view all those proudly nonmarketable (hence underground, hence elitist) loops, Anger's "film poem" was an exception to the generally sloppy, self-indulgent and ultimately failed experiments that constituted most of the Sixties' alternate cinema.

Parker Tyler, a culture critic who saw movies as pop religion and who was whispered to be the inspiration for Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*, wrote that "*Scorpio Rising* shows the intimate connection between Hell's-Angelism, idolatrous sex, childish violence and fascism." It has something for every-weird-body: leather boys in jockstraps; motorcycles revved for the kill; an S/M-er mooning over death-fetish photos of James Dean; and bikers polishing their hogs with slow, heavy, jerk-off caresses. In this last image—masturbating the death machine—life and death become as one, an idea that lies at the heart of Anger's black-magic sensibility. The real-life bikers depicted were not impressed.

Anger had spent three months of weekends filming an actual Brooklyn motorcycle club. He found the members to be "arrested adolescents"—both lower class and middle class—more dangerous to themselves than to others. Nevertheless, the intercutting of one scene in which girl partners ride the back seats of the hogs with shots of a secret male-on-male initiation orgy so enraged the bike boys that Anger had to flee New York to avoid some very unpoetic head splitting. And the American Nazi Party squawked that the swastika had been desecrated by its inclusion in this queerest of films, where shots of Christ were intercut with those of a biker pissing into his SS commando helmet.

Anger's antimilitarism is almost Calvinist in its purity. Once, at a Washington antiwar rally, he heckled a tipsy Norman Mailer off the stage, calling him a "publicity freak." Later he denounced his fellow occultists for frivolously promising to levitate the Pentagon. In fact, much of my difficulty in getting in touch with the film maker was that, until recently, he made his home in London as a protest against the Vietnam war.

And then last fall, out of the blue, Anger sent me a letter praising an article I had written on movie-star grave sites. He wrote, "I can't think of anyone more qualified to review *Hollywood Babylon*"—which was about to be published in a U. S. trade edition for the first time.

I was interested in the book more than in any of his dozen movies, because *Babylon* spells out Anger's aesthetic of self-destruction. Anger often adopts the tone of evangelistic rancor in the book—"O ye tinsel Jezebels! Ye cocaine-crazed city of celluloid!"—yet in the climactic scene, in which a despondent actress jumps to her death from the HOLLYWOOD sign, the reader is made to see her leaping with a sacrificial smile of ecstasy.

I was intrigued by Anger's proposal, because the book had been entirely rewritten since the original Paris edition was published, though most of the hellish sagas were intact: the heroin O.D. of Barbara "The Girl Who Is Too Beautiful" La Marr; the death by champagne bottle penetration of a starlet at a wild party; the botched suicide of Lupe Velez, who crawled in a silver lamé gown from her rose-strewn bed to retch up a load of chili con Seconal, then passed out with her head in the toilet bowl and drowned.

And so I went to see the film maker in the apartment he was subletting on Manhattan's Upper West Side—the *Rosemary's Baby* part of town. I have always found this area unsettling, not because of its Puerto Rican voodoo shops and Gothic fortresses but because of the light. There's something fluorescently stale about it, like the light in a library.

It was amid such permanent gloom that Anger was living. The room in which I interviewed him was littered with vintage movie magazines and movie stills; it was dominated by a giant lobby poster for the French-language version of *Rebel Without a Cause* featuring a bad sketch of a too Gallicized James Dean, which resembled the actor in the color of the hair only. In whatever form, however, Jimmy was still the god of living fast and dying young, and Anger, in *Scorpio*, had been the first to deify him as such.

The overcast neighborhood and gloomy digs seemed made especially for Anger, whose many concerns all emanate from one *idée fixe*: the romance of darkness. Thus, his rhapsodies to self-destruction, his worship of Lucifer, his amassing of terrible secrets and his membership in several occult societies, whose insignias he has tattooed down his arm. "Oh, I can't tell you what the designs mean!" he said in his soft, nervous voice. "The other members would skin me alive!"

Despite it all, Anger, in the paunchy flesh, seemed a gentle presence. Casual in blue jeans and workshirt, he was a massive but motherly-looking man, with a noble Roman profile, emphatic eyes and a flamboyant lower lip set in a pout; a face, in short, that was sensual in an overripe way.

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He had been a beautiful child. And like all beautiful children reared in the Beverly Hills of the Thirties, Anger was enrolled in an acting school that was heavy on tap-dancing drills. At the age of three—thanks to his grandmother's job as wardrobe mistress—he played the changeling prince in the Warner Bros. film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—a prophetic role, considering his future image as an S/M celebrant, for the little prince is raised to be the henchman of the fairies.

"The thing about the movie that I remember most was the day the cellophane moonbeams caught fire," he said. "The whole set could have gone up because everything was shellacked to the point of fainting; it was like glue-sniffing. But the little fairies just scampered away screaming as the *(Continued on page 113)*

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KENNETH ANGER RISING *He had always had a gut dislike for Christianity. When his parents tried to force him to attend Presbyterian Sunday school, he simply willed the church to burn down.*

(Continued from page 60) moonbeams blazed down."

Enamored of Hollywood's "*Arabian Nights* splendor," Anger soon became a fanatic collector of movie stills. Some of them appear in *Hollywood Babylon*, including a nude shot of a 17-year-old Jean Harlow, which he had obtained—"I think I gave him three Johnny Weissmullers for it"—from a kid whose father worked at Metro. Of the stars of his boyhood, Anger would later write: "Never have so few provided masturbation fodder for so many. No other religion can make that claim!"

Anger knew who-of he spoke. As a preteen from an upper-middle-class home, for example, he was sent to an exclusive cotillion club, where his foxtrot partner was Shirley Temple. Curly Shirley, then 10 or 11, was already over the hill and, for Anger's money, as scintillating as a hard-boiled egg: "She was not" he said, "my most unforgettable experience."

He had always had a gut dislike for Christianity. When his parents tried to force him to attend Presbyterian Sunday school, he simply *willed* the church to burn down. And, he said, "My parents never harassed me again." One cannot help wondering, though: His films seem so fraught with a distinctly Catholic sense of extreme cosmology—fallen angels and glittering demons and the sainthood of James Dean. "No, Catholicism had no influence on me whatsoever"—Anger said, smiling—"though I did see the film *The Song of Bernadette* from the window of my chemistry class at Beverly High, if you want to count that."

In 1947, while still a high school student, Anger filmed his first movie in his family's living room, while his parents were away for the weekend. The film was titled *Fireworks*, and it prompted Jean Cocteau to hail Anger as a fellow poet and the new *enfant terrible*; in New York, however, many underground filmgoers were horrified by what this 17-year-old kid from Hollywood had done.

Fireworks stars Anger as a youth who picks up sailors and is then gang-banged and beaten by them. ("The white figures of the sailors," wrote Parker Tyler, "are like ritual masters initiating a postulant into the severities of military-barracks sex. Stylistically it is not a perfect film; it remains a very authentic one.") After the attack, a sailor cradles the broken Anger in his arms, *Pietà* style, and, in a close-up, a stream of what is either semen or maternal milk gushes into the youth's mouth. *Fireworks* ends with a shot of a sailor's crotch: The fly unzips and out shoots a sparkling Roman candle.

Tennessee Williams called *Fireworks* "The most exciting use of cinema that I have ever seen!" Others agree, and their praise and patronage have made the film into a cult masterpiece.

In his 20s, Anger moved to Paris, where Cocteau took him under his wing. But the young film maker—who would later inherit "enough money to keep me working"—needed money to survive and so went to see a French publisher who had recently brought out a deluxe edition of the works of the Marquis de Sade; Anger figured the man was ready for a similarly eccentric, panting account of movieland's worst follies. He was. And so was Paris. *Hollywood Babylon* became an instant *succès de scandale* when it hit the stands in 1959—boxed in celluloid, bound in pink-and-gold brocade, with a nipple-flash photo of Jayne Mansfield on the cover. The book soon appeared in America in a pirated paperback edition; "I had translated two thirds of it as a presentation for an American publisher, who wrote in the rest and put my name on the cover," Anger said.

Consequently, Anger never got a penny for the over 2,000,000 paperbacks sold in the U. S. In 1971, the same publisher released a second-rate sex flick based on the book, again using Anger's name in the ads, and Anger put a curse on him: "And now that man has been condemned to eight years in prison, his wife had a hysterectomy and his son has incurable diabetes."

"Why should the wife and child bear the father's punishment?" I asked.

"Well," he pooh-poohed, "anyone with that guy for a father. . . ."

Anger had just given himself away. How much of *Hollywood Babylon*, I have long wondered, is merely inspired wishful thinking, too?

"None of it," the author insisted. "The book was painstakingly researched."

But how had he gotten the drop on those incredible scandals, scenes so excessive that even OUI blushes to publish the names of the surviving participants and intends to scurry behind the device of first initials only. How, for instance, did he learn that Ramon Novarro kept a dildo for a bedside shrine?

"Growing up in Hollywood, I always kept my ears open," Anger replied. "I used to listen at the top of the stairs at my parents' parties. But my stories are more than gossip; most are substantiated by court records. I mean, you can't call a murder that made world-wide headlines, like Novarro's, gossip! He was found with that blood-spattered dildo thrust down his throat. It was a black art-deco shlong made of lead and signed in silver by Valentino. Rudy had given it to him as a campy paperweight, and as far as the D.A. could tell, it was the instrument the two hustlers used to bludgeon the old man to death."

Granted, there is solid evidence for Anger's assertions that Charlie Chaplin's first two brides were pregnant 16-year-olds, and that when glamor-star Frances Farmer was booked on drunk charges, she signed "Cocksucker" as her occupation. But how could he back up some strictly *privileged* info? The book *names*, for instance, the still-kicking D, the Trouser Lady, and C, the Cutie-Pie who taught the King how to hitchhike, as lesbians.

"Not lesbians!" Anger interrupted. "*Bisexuals*. Joyous bisexuals."

Didn't he fear reprisal?

"Well, they can slap my face if they want to—I'll never wash it again. But no, I don't fear reprisals or lawsuits. In fact, I fought with the lawyers at Straight Arrow books to let me include a compromising snapshot of a certain very important actor. It's a close-up of him giving head, and his approach to the dick is very cute, like he's really looking forward to it, a sort of ooh-yummy expression. But the lawyers insisted that it was an invasion of privacy, and so the photo was suppressed. It's not that I want to hurt him; I just think it's time he came out of the closet."

Anger explained that the point of *Hollywood Babylon* was to strip away illusion, to show that there had to be a great discrepancy between an actor and his movie image, "because, quite simply, human beings are more complex than archetypes. And a perfect illustration of this is the he-man actor who has his chauffeur arrange liaisons for him with stevedores!"

But for all Anger's bravado, the fact is that the new edition pales beside the juicier, unauthorized edition. It might be tighter and just as bitchy-bitter, but it omits many of the former's mind blowers—such as, for instance, Tyrone Power's enthusiasm for filth.

"The shit passions of Tyrone Power and movie mogul Sam Spiegel are all there in the new edition," Anger insisted, "but spaded underground like fertilizer. In other words, the real dirt is in code!"

Sock-o! What could be more Kenneth Anger than making Liz-and-Dick-type nonsense worthy of a Rosetta stone! But he was willing to reveal only that the code has to do with capital letters, cuneiform writing and reading vertically.

The idea, Anger said, came from two

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Egyptologists he met through Cocteau who told him of how certain hieroglyphics have a double meaning. "On the surface," Anger said, "the script might be chronicling a Pharaoh's victory, but once you knew the key, it was describing a medicine that cured epilepsy." Certainly such an elaborate system would account for *Babylon*'s layout, its seemingly random capitalization, its alliteration and its peculiar word spacing. Anger promised $1000 to the first person who cracked the code and advised taking "a handful of Judy Garland specials" (speed) to help with the task.

Anger has already gotten mail about one choice item in the book: that the Sharon Tate massacre resembled "a jetplane crash: the Bad Ship Lollipop piloted by Uncle Sugar." He explained that, to those familiar with Army Intelligence slang, this meant that the free-spending Government ("Uncle Sugar") had programed Manson "with mind-warping drugs" to commit senseless crimes in order to discredit the youth movement (an alleged CIA operation called Project Bad Ship Lollipop).

Anger has no remorse about burying his most sensational data in ciphers: "I wrote *Hollywood Babylon* for one reader in a thousand. The code is a challenge to his ingenuity and diligence." But it had another function for Anger: "It's my way, as a magician, of acting on people's minds, either subliminally, when they skim along the top layer of print, or actually, when they dig down to solve the puzzle. For hidden inside this very profane history of Hollywood—with all its junkies and sickies—is an esoteric history of a magical brother- and sisterhood. The 33 chapters represent the 33 degrees of Masonic initiation. See, to me, all these showbiz characters are initiates of Aleister Crowley's Order of the Silver Star, the Argenteum Astrum."

Anger didn't expand on this provocative theory, but later I did some detective work with Crowley's diary. Here's what I pieced together: The Argenteum Astrum is the inner sanctum of secret societies; one might be a member of it unwittingly—indeed, without even knowing such an order exists!—just by virtue of an extreme self-absorption, the sort of egomania often exhibited by film stars. "All the Hollywood Babylonians," Anger said in the book, "gave themselves to the dark forces, the angels of fire, with no holding back. Clara Bow, for instance, used to gang-bang with an entire football team!" In return for this dedication to self, there was fame, fortune and "an inner wisdom."

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Anger's fascination with the occult became more pronounced after his stint in Paris in the Fifties. It was in that period that he discovered Aleister Crowley, who, as the rhyme goes, practiced "magick unholy" until his death in 1947. Crowley, like Anger, had divined at an early age that his sympathies lay with the foes of heaven—all those fabuli who wreak havoc in the last, prophetic chapter of the Bible. Eventually Crowley came to believe that he was The Beast of the Apocalypse, the ultimate anti-Christ, and that evil was a positive principle.

Such a sacrilegious notion titillated Anger, who began to study all of Crowley's books and went to Sicily to soak up the vibes at Crowley's infamous abbey, the site of his supposed human sacrifices.

"Oh, Crowley may have crucified some alley cats," said Anger, "but the human-sacrifice rumor is absurd! What happened was that one of his guests drank contaminated water and died of typhoid fever. The world press sensationalized it as some sort of blood orgy, and Crowley had to flee Sicily by order of Mussolini's police. . . ."

Anger spent a whole summer at the abbey, restoring Crowley's pornographic frescoes, which the police had whitewashed. The salvage job was slow, in places impossible, but the revelations were often staggering. "There were bawdy frescoes everywhere, floor to ceiling: ladies mounted by goats, all sorts of fantastic couplings," Anger said.

Upon returning to America in the early Sixties, Anger decided that it was "in the teenage cults that magic emerges into the contemporary world." In *Scorpio Rising*, the leather boys exude the aura of high school hoods who, being social outsiders, have identified with the most super*macho* of bad guys, Nazi storm troopers. The film's sound track of 100-decibel punky Top-40 hits predated the rock innovations of *Easy Rider* and *American Graffiti* and has never been surpassed for audacity; at one point, Christ rides a donkey as the Crystals blast "He's a rebel, and he'll never be any good!" But the outrages paid off, for the Ford Foundation gave Anger $10,000 to make his next movie, about the customized-car cult.

"The kids who make their own cars really live in a dream world," Anger said at the time. "They aren't allowed to drive those cars on the highway, you see, so they just *work* on them. They are in love with the inhuman, and, set loose in a technological world, they could really become dangerous."

Although the hot-rod film had to be scrapped as a major project when the lead died in a smashup, a fragment of the footage was later released as *Kustom Kar Kommandos*. ("The Ks are the authentic teenage spelling," Anger explained, "their way of excluding adults.") The film shows a pink convertible being polished by a huge white powder puff, which seems to glide across the screen by itself; gradually, however, we see that the puff is being propelled by a duck-tailed youth dressed in an aqua T-shirt and faded jeans. The blue of the kid's clothes and the pink of the car—the yang and yin of babyland—cause an erotic tension to emerge through the soft focus. In the background, syrupy voices sing *Dream Lover*. Sex as obsession; suicide as joy; all secrets are fetishes—the messages of *KKK* recur throughout Anger's work.

"If I tend toward violent themes," Anger said, "it's because I'm Scorpio ascendant. In *Scorpio Rising*, I made a careful visual delineation of that sign in terms of what it rules: sex, death and machinery. So, you see, I'm just playing out my nature. But I believe in the sacredness of life. I don't even approve of hurting animals. It's just coincidence that my three heaviest involvements have been with psychopaths."

Anger feels that the men who come to him are "elementals." "Oh, they were human once," he elaborated, "but at some stage, a demonic force moves in and sits there." He has tried to film them, "but they come and go too quickly." In fact, *Lucifer Rising*—an Anger project that has been in the works for the past ten years—was suggested by an elemental who had Anger sign a contract with Lucifer in blood.

Anger said, "I was in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco at dawn, reciting an invocation to a spirit—the Bornless One—who is associated with a vivid indigo blue, a color that is also sacred to Lucifer. Well, I looked up from my book and saw this sudden blue flash on the other side of the lake. I went toward it and saw this wild-looking young man sneaking up on a duck, which he meant to eat on the spot, because he was on the run from an insane asylum in Oregon and hadn't eaten for days. I soon realized that the flash had been caused by the sun bouncing off his locket, which was enameled with the iridescent indigo of a butterfly's wing. His name was Joe and on the back of his jacket he had drawn a demon: a torso with a male and a female head. I asked him what the drawing meant, and he said, 'Well, I'm a man

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in a woman's orbit,' which was a very strange thing for an unlettered stud to say.

"Whenever I pressed him for his full name, he would hedge; finally, he told me that he was Joe Lucifer, a fallen angel among many fallen angels, just passing through. He gave me a lot of information, which I would use in *Lucifer Rising*, and said if I wanted more, I'd have to sign a commitment to Lucifer in blood. So I pricked my finger and initialed a contract he had drawn up with crayons. Then he disappeared—I won't say he went in a flash—but soon after, he and the contract were nowhere to be seen. He had behaved, in other words, exactly like a demon in a medieval book."

Anger later had LUCIFER tattooed across his chest; but he was quick to say that he is not a satanist. "Lucifer is the angel of light; Satan, in Hebrew, means the dark side, the adversary. The Jews called everyone they fought Satan."

The strange history of *Lucifer Rising* continued when Anger cast Bobby Beausoleil in the title role. "Bobby was 19," Anger recalled, "always trying to power-trip me and to direct the film." When the film was finished, Beausoleil split with the footage. Anger felt so brutalized by the theft that he took out a full-page ad in *The Village Voice* that read:

IN MEMORIAM
KENNETH ANGER
FILM MAKER 1947–1967

and sent telegrams to his friends, announcing his death. In no time, however, he had pulled himself together and was laying a heavy curse on the errant Beausoleil.

"It's like the old fairy tale in which the toad turns into the prince; I turned the prince into the toad. His dark side took over—with considerable help from Charlie M. Now, like the toad, Bobby sits in the well, in prison."

Beausoleil was there because he had been convicted of knifing a musician named Gary Hinman, who had wronged Charlie Manson—a helter-skelterish murder that supposedly triggered the Tate-La Bianca debacle. "Manson wanted to get Bobby out of jail by making it look as if the Hinman killer was still at large, killing people indiscriminately," Anger said.

At present, the film maker and his one-time lover have patched things up—"Bobby still says he didn't steal the film, but there's no question that he did"—and Anger gets 20-page letters in which Beausoleil claims that he has now become Lucifer.

"When we lived together," Anger recalled, "I warned him never to read the Crowley books, because he was too young and would jump to the wrong conclusions, which, I'm afraid, he did."

Anger edited the remaining fragments of *Lucifer Rising* into an 11-minute barrage of jump cuts and called it *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. When the film was shown at the Edinburgh Festival in 1969, a church next door spontaneously burst into flames. "I didn't will that one," Anger contended. "It's just that the invocation in the film was a very potent call to the demon world."

Invocation was scored on the Moog by Mick Jagger, who agreed to star in yet another production of *Lucifer* but later welshed on the deal. "The only concrete result," said the disenchanted Anger, "is that Mick wrote *Sympathy for the Devil*—an interesting song but only half of what I was saying. I know my theories didn't make a dent on Mick, because at his wedding he wore a very prominent gold cross."

Now, in its 12th version, *Lucifer Rising* is finally ready for release with an English steel-mill worker as Lucifer and a sound track by Jimmy Page. Anger is also finishing up a second movie-scandal book titled *Trade Secrets*. "It's in code, too—sort of the *Hollywood Babylon* code in reverse." Anger again insisted that he wasn't just pulling my leg about that code and, to whet my curiosity, he deciphered one of *Babylon*'s hidden defamations: "Walt Disney," he said calmly, "was a transvestite."

"Jeeee-sus," I mumbled numbly. That would really knock every Mouseketeer on his Mouseke-ear. But, jumpin' Jiminy Cricket, Anger proceeded to document his allegation: I was shown a fuzzy photo of a guy in matronly Dustbowl weeds, with the caption: "At 14, [Disney's] artistic soul began to show a little; he liked to act in his mother's clothes."

"Hold it, Kenneth," I said. "This is just a *kid*, not a full-blown transvestite!"

"Listen," Anger shot back, "if Disney was dragging up at fourteen, I'm sure he didn't stop at fifteen! And I know for a fact that every New Year's Eve, Uncle Walt threw a party where he got up in panties and garters and *every*thing!"

Anger's already rosy complexion was becoming even more florid. He didn't like being questioned, and my little doubt was about to unleash a torrent of Snow White slush.

"Walt Disney was the Hitler of children! He killed their imagination by programing them for his saccharine prefab fantasies. He *hated* them. He had a torture chamber for them in his house. This is another nugget from *Babylon*. I'm not saying he actually tortured children, now; the chamber was an after-dinner joke for his guests. He'd open a small, rounded door in the wall—a fairy-tale sort of door that creaked—and take his guests down a winding staircase into a dungeon filled with racks and Iron Maidens scaled to the size of a five-year-old! 'Now, this is how I really feel about the little bastards,' he'd say, and puff on his cigar.

"And Disneyland in Anaheim, California"—the bile was flowing; Anger was in top form—"has nothing to do with entertaining kids! It was constructed for the sole purpose of preserving Disney's body forever! He's frozen in a cryogenized nitrogen-filled capsule in the tower of Sleeping Beauty's Castle, and in case of a power cut, Disneyland has emergency generators to keep the tower at 40 below! In short, Walt Disney *is* Sleeping Beauty!"

Anger was convinced that the animator had been a black magician—"because a black magician wants to hold onto his personality at all costs, and Disney made a series of films to be shown posthumously at board meetings." Before one of these films rolls, the board members are seated left to right in a specified order; then, from the screen, a giant Disney points to each member, addressing him by name, telling one not to drink so much, another not to play around.

"Sort of an annual bad-will message. And to this day there's still a new film every year!"

But the most terrible story about Disney, Anger said, isn't even a secret:

"It's well-known in the industry, because it was witnessed by scores of technicians. In his later years, Disney was supervising one of those nature films about a mother bear and her cubs. Most of it was shot in the mountains, but one scene, in which the mother suckles her young, had to be done in the studio. Well, the wild bear was too freaked out by the shut-in stage to lie down for the camera. Eventually Disney came on the set and asked if the scene had been wrapped up yet. 'No,' said the director, 'the bear's not cooperating.' So Uncle Walt looked at the bewildered bear and said, 'Shoot its fucking head off!' And that's how the movie was finished on time. They framed the scene to avoid the blasted head, concentrating instead on the poor little cubs snuggled up to what audiences thought was a loving mother. That's an insight into all of *Hollywood Babylon*."

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And that was the interview—given by a regal Anger, sitting in a chair covered

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with a bright-orange sheet. ("It has no magical significance; I just like the color.") Beneath the stare of the poster James Dean, the room was full of things Anger liked: marbles in a jar; peacock feathers in a vase; flying-saucer newsletters ("Some people think Saint John was describing saucer raids in the *Apocalypse*"); and a stack of Thirties' *Pour Vous*, the French *Photoplay* ("Handle them as delicately as you would the Dead Sea Scrolls," Anger admonished).

Now 46, Anger remains the changeling prince still, the child who never quite got over the magical idea that pictures could move. The orange sheet really caught his essence; it was the color of fire, the motif of *Fireworks* and of his admitted identification with Lucifer. For, in Anger's romance of darkness, fire provides the perverse note, the flickering contradiction that only intensifies the surrounding gloom.

Such a gut perversity characterized his letter announcing my curse. A month earlier, I had given him an Anger-inspired article in which I had nominated Jayne Mansfield for sainthood as the patron saint of gossip columnists. To clinch my (mock) divinity case, I repeated a tale gleaned from three Jayne bios, to the effect that the reason that the star died in a gruesome car crash was that she had refused to worship the Devil and was thus cursed by a prominent West Coast satanist (whom I named).

Do I have to tell you that Anger was best friends with the guy and rushed to San Francisco to shove the piece under his satanic nose? "Never have I seen him roused to such a towering fury!" Anger wrote in a school marmish tone. Apparently Jayne and the towering inferno used to ride around all night, having loads of laughs, and this satanist would never *ever* inscribe her name in his Book of Curse. So he inscribed mine there instead. "This will be a lesson to you," fussed Anger, "never to print an unsupported rumor." Which is rather the pot calling the kettle.

But perhaps it is simply a lack of perspective that makes Anger condemn in others what he himself celebrates. This same absurd double standard snakes through *Hollywood Babylon*. On the one hand, he derides Louella Parsons as a salivating sensation-monger catering to "the great gee-whiz public," and, on the other, he snickers over ex-star Marie Prevost's being found, long after her suicide, half-eaten by her starving dachshund. He includes a photo of the ravaged lady (legs gnawed, arm missing) and, with typical finesse, captions it "Doggie's Dinner."

Now Mr. Self-Righteous was telling me, "Thousands of satanists across the country will damn your name every Saturday night!" I saw the curse as a psychological attack, so I retaliated in kind: I burned Anger's letter in the toilet bowl. I figured that, if they had black magic, I had my baroque tradition of Catholic white magic: Out came the rosary beads (I was lucky I could still find them) and a scapular (a cloth icon worn around the neck), and I waved this regalia over the flaming letter, chanting something pious like "Die, you bastard" as it curled up into ash. For good measure, I went about the house, intoning at the furniture, "Be gone, Satan, for I am a child of Mary"—a formula that the brothers taught us in high school to ward off self-abuse. Well, the formula hadn't worked then; I had little hope it would now.

And then, a week or so later, I came down with hepatitis. At least, that's what it looked like. In any case, whatever it was that turned my urine brown and made me sleep whole days away was out of my blood by week's end!

Now, I like Anger too much to think he'll beset me with more hobgoblins. But if he does sic the cloven-hoofers on me, I figure "the mark of death" is on my head already, thanks to him. Might as well go fast and furious, like a Hollywood Babylonian.

Actually, despite Anger's talk of The Beast and The Whore, he seemed intent on conventional goodness, like his Lucifer trying to climb back up the celestial ladder. For, as much as the aesthetic of darkness may be sultry and velvet, the reality is cold and belittling. I still enjoy Anger's work, but I think often now of what Simone Weil said: "Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating."

Sure, Anger's dishy hallucinations of a world over the edge are forever fun, but it's only the greatest artists who can convince us of happy endings. ▣

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